

Message Text

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CINCPAC HONOLULU

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 4663

LIMDIS

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT PGOV TH

SUBJECT: MILITARY ALERT FULLY STOOD DOWN; SITUATION IN BANGKOK CALM

REF: BANGKOK 4311

SUMMARY: SITUATION IN BANGKOK GENERALLY CALM AS LAST WEEK'S MILITARY ALERT (REFTEL) ENDED ENTIRELY ON FEB 29. SOCIALIST PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL MURDERED EARLY FEB 28, BRINGING FORTH VIRTUALLY UNIVERSAL DENUNCIATIONS OF MURDER FROM PRINCIPAL POLITICAL FIGURES. WHILE MILITARY OR MILITARY-CIVILIAN MOVE REMAINS POSSIBILITY, WE HAVE NO RPT NO EVIDENCE THAT ELEMENTS ESSENTIAL FOR MOUNTING IT HAVE YET BEEN PUT TOGETHER.
END SUMMARY

1. FOLLOWING MILITARY ALERT IN BANGKOK FEB 24-25 (REF) TWO-THIRDS OF MILITARY PERSONNEL INVOLVED WERE STOOD DOWN FEB 24, BUT ONE-THIRD REMAINED ON ALERT STATUS. AS PART OF GENERAL WINDING DOWN OF MILITARY TENSION REMAINING PERSONNEL STOOD DOWN FEB 29. SITUATION GENERALLY CALM IN BANGKOK.

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2. HOWEVER, SECRETARY GENERAL OF SOCIALIST PARTY OF THAILAND BUNSANONG BUNYOTHAYAN, A LEADING-ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT FIGURE IN

THAI POLITICS, WAS MURDERED BY PERSONS UNKNOWN IN EARLY MORNING HOURS OF FEBRUARY 28 JUST OUTSIDE OF BANGKOK ON ROAD TO AIRPORT. BUNSANONG WAS SHOT BY A MOTORCYCLIST WHILE DRIVING HIS CAR AND WAS DEAD ON ARRIVAL AT HOSPITAL (SEPTTEL REPORTS DETAILS OF AFFAIR). MURDER HAS BROUGHT VIRTUALLY UNIVERSAL DENUNCIATION FROM MAJOR POLITICAL FIGURES, INCLUDING PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT AND FORMER OPPOSITION LEADER SENI PRAMOT. IN RATHER EMOTIONAL (IF UNDERSTANDABLE) COMMENT TO PRESS FEBRUARY 29 COLONEL SOMKHIT SISANGKHOM, SOCIALIST PARTY LEADER, SAID "WE WILL CONTINUE TO FIGHT THROUGH A PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM, BUT IF THEY WANT US TO BE COMMUNISTS, THEN WE WILL TAKE UP ARMS AND GO INTO THE JUNGLES." THERE IS WIDESPREAD SUSPICION IN BANGKOK THAT THIS MURDER WAS ARRANGED BY RIGHT WING ELEMENTS, AND THIS SUSPICION APPEARS TO UNDERLIE THE VERY CAUTIOUS MANNER IN WHICH PRESS COMMENTARY ON THE AFFAIR IS BEING HANDLED.

3. THERE HAS EVIDENTLY BEEN SOME INCREASE IN CARRYING OF WEAPONS BY POLITICAL FIGURES SINCE MURDER OF BUNSANONG. EMBOFF OBSERVED COLONEL SOMKHIT AT WAKE FOR BUNSANONG, ACCOMPANIED BY BODYGUARD. DEMOCRAT PARTY SPOKESMAN WIRA MUSIKKAPHONE WAS ARRESTED EARLY MORNING HOURS OF FEBRUARY 28 FOR CARRYING .25 CAL BERETTA FOR WHICH HE DID NOT RTP NOT HAVE LICENSE. IN THIS CONNECTION POLICE SPECIAL BRANCH COMMANDER, COLONEL SANTHAD THANAPHUM TOLD PRESS FEBRUARY 29 THAT SPECIAL BRANCH WOULD PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO ACTIVITIES OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND GROUPS IN PERIOD REMAINING BEFORE ELECTION. CASUAL OBSERVATION ON BANGKOK STREETS INDICATES STEPPED-UP CHECKS ON MOTORCYCLES IN PARTICULAR.

4. IN CLEAR RESPONSE TO COUP REMORS OF PAST WEEK SECRETARY GENERAL OF NATIONAL STUDENTS CENTER OF THAILAND KRIANGKAMON LAOPHPAIROT TOLD PRESS FEBRUARY 29 THE NSCT IS PREPARING CAMPAIGN TO READY PEOPLE AND STUDENTS TO RESIST ANY POSSIBLE COUP ATTEMPT. HE COMMENTS, "BETWEEN RESISTANCE AND DISTRESS, WE HAVE NO BETTER CHOICE BUT TO CHOOSE RESISTANCE. WE, THE STUDENTS AND THE PEOPLE, MUST DO EVERYTHING TO DEFEND OUR PRECIOUS DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS UNTIL THE END OF OUR LIVES."

5. COMMENT. WHILE MILITARY OR CIVILIAN-MILITARY MOVE REMAINS
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POSSIBILITY, WE HAVE NO RPT NO EVEDENCE THAT ELEMENTS ESSENTIAL FOR MOUNTING SUCH AN ATTEMPT HAVE YET BEEN PUT TOGETHER. FINAL STAND-DOWN OF FIRST ARMY IN BANGKOK FEBRUARY 29 IS SIGN OF LESSENING TENSION, AT LEAST FOR THE MOMENT. THIS IS POTENTIALLY OFFSET BY MURDER OF BUNSANONG. WHILE REACTION TO DATE HAS BEEN RESTRAINED, WE EXPECT TENSIONS TO MOUNT DURING PROLONGED CEREMONIES TRADITIONALLY ASSOCIATED WITH THAI CREMATIONS. POLICE SOURCES TELL US THEY ARE SERIOUSLY CONCERNED THAT THE STUDENTS WILL SEIZE THIS ISSUE AND THAT DEMONSTRATIONS WILL RESULT. MUCH WILL DEPEND TN THE VIGOR SHOWN BY RTG IN PURSUING

THE INVESTIGATION AND ITS SUCCESS IN SOLVING THE MURDER. IMPACT
OF THIS LATEST DRAMATIC DEVELOPMENTCANNOT YET BE CLEARLY
DETERMINED, BUT THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT IT HAS TENDED FURTHER
TO POLARIZE THAI POLITICAL SCENE.
WHITEHOUSE

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